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ABSTRACT

A model of internal principle for integrating past research findings on adult altruism postulates that although individuals' shared beliefs result in significant group effects, there remains a significant portion of variation due to a subject's "factor" or unique internal rule. To examine the influence of both the level (degree or amount) and the salience (obviousness) of need and deservedness on helping scores, 77 college students (16 men and 61 women) responded to vignettes of 32 helping situations, for a total of 2,464 responses. Analyses of results supported the model, and suggest that both factor salience and factor level influence altruism. Some factors, such as recipient gender, may have more or less influence depending upon both factor salience and factor level; although they operate as a single entity, factor salience and level can be manipulated independently to influence decisions to aid. The internal principle model suggests that for optimal predictability the salience as well as the level of each determinant of altruism should be considered in each helping opportunity. (JAC)

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Internal Rule of Altruism: The Joint Influence of Determinant Salience and Level

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Internal Rule of Altruism: The Joint

Influence of Determinant Salience and Level

Peterson has proposed a model which attempts to integrate several past research findings on adult altruism. The following three predictions of the model were explicitly tested: 1. Altruism is multiply and interactively determined. 2. Each individual has a unique rule of altruism and although most individuals share similar beliefs about the determinants of altruism, resulting in significant group effects, there will remain a significant portion of variation due to a "subjects" factor or a unique, internal rule. 3. The level (degree or amount) and salience (obviousness) of a factor jointly influence the decision to aid. For the present experiment, both the level and salience of recipient need and deservedness, two factors which are frequently regarded as common determinants of altruism were used to test the model. Level of a factor was regarded as the absolute amount of the factor present (i.e., how much need, how deserving, etc.), while salience of a factor referred to the degree to which a factor was clearly or unambiguously present. While these attributes are postulated to operate jointly (i.e., the salience of a determinant influences the subject's response to the level of that determinant) they are capable of being varied independently of one another in the real world. Most social psychological experiments rely on high salience of a factor to ensure its influence and because a high level of a factor is so often accompanied by high salience, some investigators may have come to view them as inextricably confounded. However, this is not the case. Take, for example, the situation in which one is riding on a subway and an individual, looking pale, sits down across the way, leans back his head, gives a little moan, shuts his eyes, and relaxes his limbs. The individual may be dying of a drug overdose, an insulin reaction, or a heart condition (very high need indeed) or may simply be tired and happy to get off his feet. Thus, the salience can be very low while the level of determinant--need--is very high. Similarly, need can be very low (I

drop a dime which I am completely capable of retrieving) but salience may be high (it lands on your foot). The following experiment utilized a completely crossed design to examine the influence of both the level and the salience of need and deservedness upon helping scores.

Method

Subjects. Seventy-seven undergraduates, 16 men and 61 women in a lower division psychology course served as subjects. Each subject responded to all 32 helping situations, so number of responses (n = 2464) rather than number of subjects was regarded as the sample in this experiment.

Design and Procedures. Five factors were manipulated, resulting in a 2 (high vs. low recipient need) x 2 (high vs. low level of recipient deservedness) x 2 (high vs. low saliency of recipient need) x 2 (high vs. low saliency of recipient deservedness) x 2 (recipient gender) factorial analysis of variance, producing 32 unique cells. In this experiment, each factorial combination of the factors was thus represented only once. Thirty-two vignettes were written in which an adult of indeterminant age, physical attractiveness, etc. was portrayed as a potential recipient of the subject's help. The cost for the help required in each case was held constant and was minimal--either the recipient needed some information the subject had available, some effort such as picking up small objects, or a small sum of money (25¢ or less). Each vignette described a single level and saliency of recipient need and deservedness, and these were completely counterbalanced. Potential help recipients in low level of need were presented as experiencing a minor inconvenience (e.g., losing a quarter in a pop machine or dropping small objects which would need to be retrieved), while recipients in high level of need were presented as experiencing a large inconvenience (e.g., having no bus fare to get home on a cold night or being about to fall from a tall ladder). Potential help recipients presented as

low level deserving were described as behaving in a careless or irresponsible manner (e.g., dropping objects while arguing or losing necessary funds by betting with a friend), while recipients portrayed as high level deserving were presented as pleasant or helpful (e.g., someone who loses a piece of jewelry while holding a child up to get a drink of water or someone waiting patiently for a salesclerk). These cues followed Lerner's (1974) description of deservedness. No other cues relevant to other determinants of altruism were presented. Each helping task and situation presented was unique.

The order of vignettes was randomized. Subjects were asked to anonymously respond to each vignette by indicating what they themselves would think and do if they found themselves in this situation. After reading and commenting on all 32 vignettes, subjects were asked to rate on a 1 (do nothing) to 5 (give complete help, no matter what is necessary) scale how much they would help the individual in the story.

Results

Intention to Help. Preliminary analyses which included level and salience of need and deservedness as separate factors resulted in significant findings for all level, salience and the predicted level x salience interactions (p's < .01). The level and salience for need and deservedness were subsequently collapsed, both to avoid meaningless interaction terms (e.g., salience of need x level of deservedness), because the manipulation checks suggested salience and level were perceived as a single cue, and because the postulated model assumes level and salience operate jointly. Thus for subsequent analyses, level and salience of need were regarded as one factor with four levels (i.e., high level salient need, high level nonsalient need, low level salient need, and low level nonsalient need). Level and salience of deservedness were similarly regarded as one four level factor.

The helping scale scores on the (1 - do nothing to 5 - give complete help) scale for each vignette were then entered into a 4 (need) x 4 (deservedness) x 2 (gender of recipient in story) x 2 (subject's sex) analysis of variance.

The first prediction of the model, that altruism was multidetermined, was confirmed by the data from the vignettes. The data show that recipients who were in more need received higher helping scores than recipients in less need, deserving recipients received more help than nondeserving recipients, and need and deservedness interacted. Female recipients received higher helping scores than male recipients, and this interacted with sex of subject such that women subjects gave more to female recipients than did subjects who were men. The vignette data also provide clear support for the second prediction. There was a separate effect for subjects, independent of general subjects' characteristics like sex, consistent with the notion of a stable, unique internal rule.

The third prediction that both factor level and factor salience influence judgments of helpgiving was supported both by earlier cited analyses and by mean comparisons which followed the tests above. Figure 1 summarizes the results for analyses of need. Newman-Kuels tests indicated that helping scores were reliably lower in the low need-low saliency condition than in the other three groups. The helping score for the high need-high salience group was higher than the other three groups, and the two intermediate conditions did not differ from one another.

Figure 2 illustrates the joint determination of helping for the two levels (high and low) of deservedness and the two amounts (high and low) of saliency of deservedness. Newman-Kuels tests showed that when saliency of deservedness was high and the recipients' deservedness level was low, they were helped reliably less than recipients in the other three conditions of saliency and deservedness, which did not differ from one another. Unlike a low level of need, low deservedness when highly salient had a negative rather than a null impact on helpgiving.

Gender of recipient interacted with need salience and level such that females were helped substantially more than males when need level was low and salient or when need was high but nonsalient but not when low level need was nonsalient or high level need was salient. In other words, the influence which saliency of the level of need had seemed stronger for males and weaker for females.

On the other hand, findings resulting from the interaction of gender with deservedness suggested that saliency of deservedness influenced giving help to female recipients more than male recipients. Female recipients were helped much more than male recipients when deservedness was low yet nonsalient or when deservedness was high and salient; less difference was found when deservedness was low and salient, and the least difference was found when deservedness was high but nonsalient. These data provide further support for the model's hypotheses: the multiple influence of factors on helping and the interactive influence of such factors, the existence of a separate subjects factor and the utility of considering both salience and level of a factor.

Discussion

This study provided support for each of the predictions. Although the suggestion that altruism is determined by many interacting factors has been made many times in the past it must be noted that many investigators continue to examine control over altruistic responding one determinant at a time. If this more traditional approach had been taken in the present study, examining only the effects of need or only the effects of deservedness, statistically reliable effects would have been obtained. However, the actual magnitude of these effects would have been trivial (e.g., ω^2 = .05 and .06, respectively). Utilizing the internal rule model, on the other hand, provided a much improved method of accounting for the variance (ω^2 = .41). The advantage of the multiply determined, interactive model extends not only to better statistical prediction but also to a better representation of the real world, where in most situations both number

of factors and saliency of factors vary. Similarly, different subject reactions to factor levels and different sensitivity to factor salience is anticipated in the internal rule model and thus rather than demanding high interpersonal consistency, this model assumes some degree of consistent intersubject variation in the form of a subjects effect.

The current results suggest that both factor salience and factor level influence altruism, that some factors like recipient gender may have more or less influence depending upon both factor salient and factor level, and that, although they seem to operate as a single entity, factor salience and level can be manipulated independently to each cast its own influence upon decisions to aid. While some experimenters have considered the salience of recipient need in altruistic responding, for the most part factor salience has been taken for granted, kept at high levels in social psychological experiments and regarded as a nuisance or error contributing variable when encountered in naturalistic observation. The interal principle model suggests that the salience as well as the level of each determinant of altruism should be considered in each helpgiving opportunity for optimal predictability. This issue may be particularly important when making the transition from the laboratory where salience can be controlled to naturalistic observation where factor salience may vary widely. Future research can profitably be directed toward the issue of factor salience.

Reference

Lerner, M.J. Social psychology of justice and interpersonal attraction. In T. Huston (Ed.) Foundations of interpersonal attraction. New York: Academic Press, 1974.

Figure 1

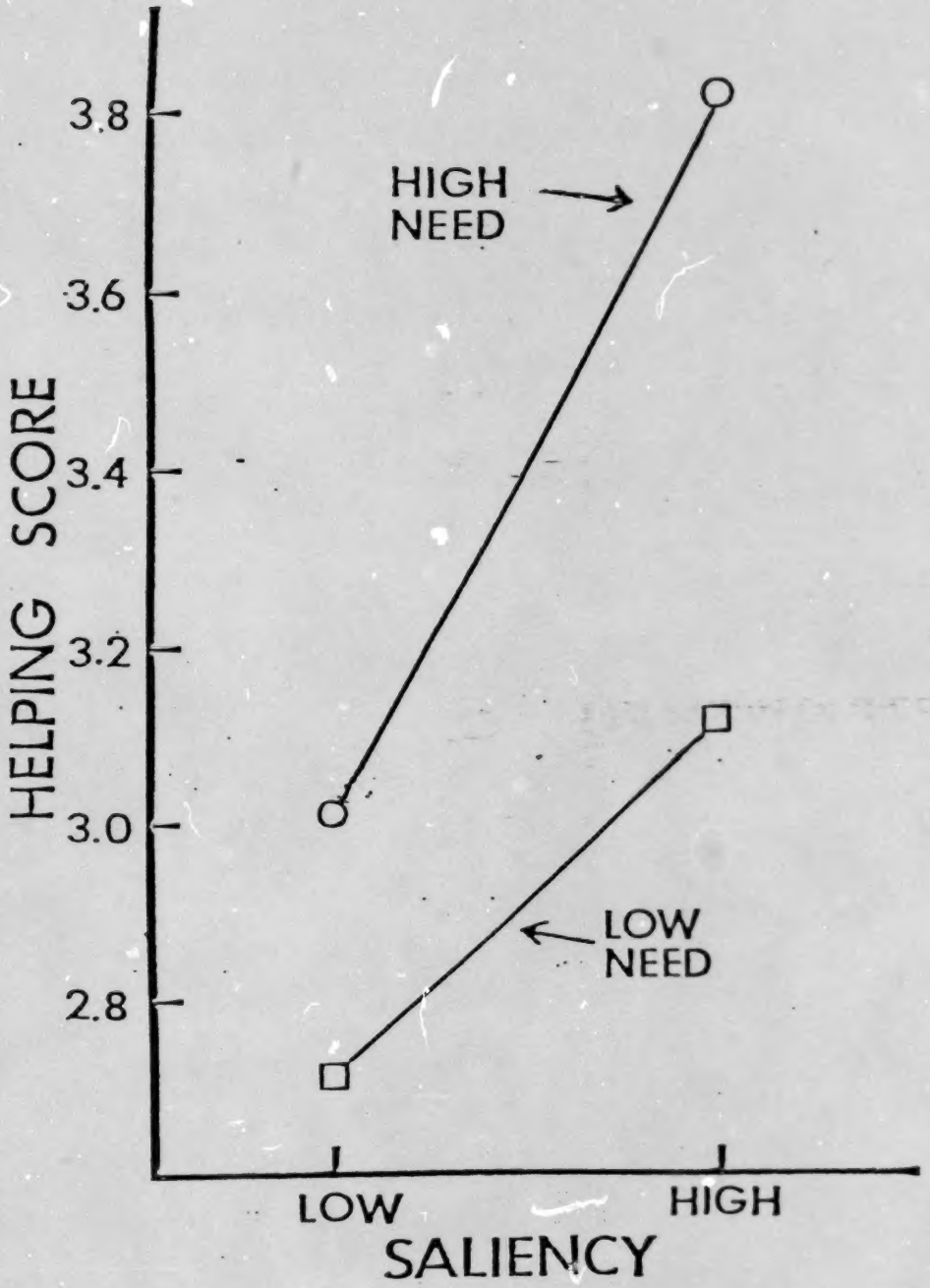
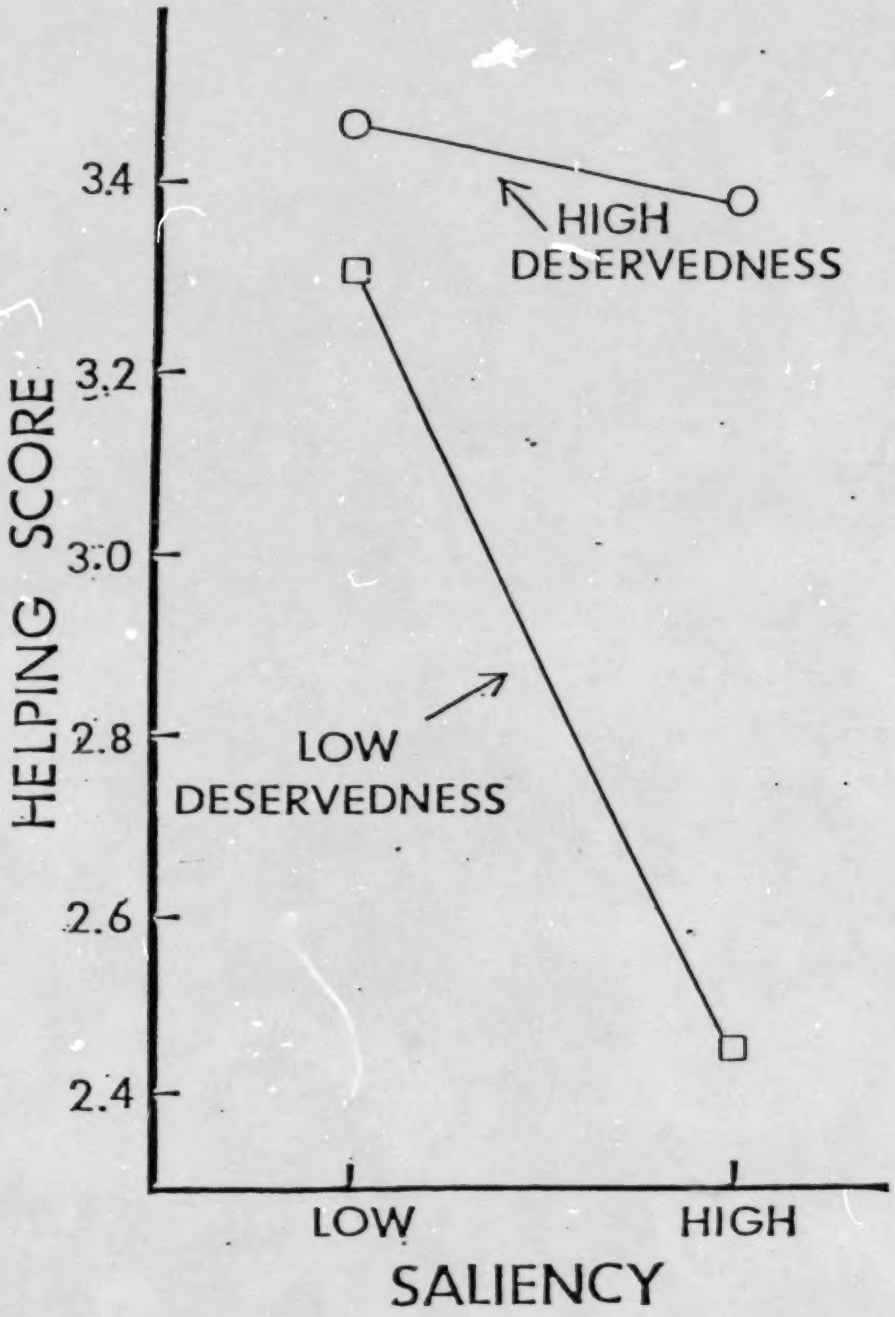

3.8
3.6
3.4
3.2
3.0
2.8
HELPING SCORE
HIGH NEED
LOW NEED
LOW
HIGH
SALIENCY

Figure 2


HELPING SCORE
3.4
3.2
3.0
2.8
2.6
2.4
HIGH DESERVEDNESS
LOW DESERVEDNESS
LOW
HIGH
SALIENCY